A Worldly Gospel

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"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, **whose God is their belly**, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Philippians 3:18-19

Idolatry

Let's stop for a while and consider the real meaning behind the word "idolatry". The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "idolatry" as "the worship of a physical object as a god". Why do people still want to worship these so called idols, when these worship rituals often involve satanic rites and sacrifices? In the letter to the Colossians, Apostle Paul gave a very succinct definition of idolatry:

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:" Colossians 3:5-6

Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, defined idolatry as **covetousness**. Why is this so? Covetousness, the inordinate desire to posses material and physical blessings, is the underlying motive for all forms of idol worship. Let me illustrate my point with an example. Many people in Indonesia travel to Mount Kawi, a pagan sacred place in East Java. They do not go there because of their love and devotion for the spirits inhabiting the mount. No! They do it to get the material rewards promised to all who come. In fact, that place is known in local tongue as "pesugihan", which means "the place that bring riches".

Let's now compare idolatry (which we know is covetousness) and the popular "prosperity theology". Wikipedia defines prosperity theology (or prosperity gospel) as "a religious belief found among many Christians centred on the notion that God provides material prosperity for those He favours". Aren't they sound just the same?

I challenge you to closely observe the sermons preached in your own churches. Does your preacher emphasize material blessings? Does he claim that God will and shall shower the people in his church with wealth? Does he use wealth to lure people to join the church? Watch out!

If you answer yes to any of the questions above, be weary! Your church might be preaching a false gospel, a worldly gospel; a twisted gospel which tries to entice people using material blessings. Many will come to such churches in the same way that many flocked into Mount Kawi.

I don't mean that God will not bless His people with material blessings, or that Christians will always live in poverty. God is all wise, He knows the intentions of our hearts. God's blessings are given to those who love Him, not those who are only after His blessings. To love God and to do His will should be our priority over seeking for God's blessings. In fact, our duty as the children of God is to love Him with all of our heart; the giving of blessings is God's sovereign right. Imagine how would you feel if your children come to you only because of your gifts, not because they love you. More so, it is an abomination to God if our motive to serve Him is material blessings, and not love.

This worldly gospel is prevalent in many churches where the preachers tout the prosperity gospel. However, those who come because of the promise of material riches are more likely to suffer material loss instead of getting richer. Why so? Those preachers who are so preoccupied with material blessings, they are more likely to do anything to gain worldly riches. They wouldn't hesitate picking people with great success story as examples of the fruits of their ministry; such approach is highly subjective and manipulative.

These anecdotal stories have been the driving power that move people to flock to these so-called prosperity churches. Take the example of Ponari, a small village boy in East Java. The boy and his little stone have been the centre of attention of Indonesian media in 2009 for the alleged healing power he possessed. Thousands from around the country have flocked to his village to seek physical healing from this small boy.

False Miracles

Another characteristic of idol worship, beside the emphasis on material blessings, is the abundance of (false) miracles. These "healers" are quick to guarantee healing to those who come, but also quick to blame other things if the patients are not healed. More often than not, those who get healed are those who suffer psychological or mental disturbance. These successful cases are often hand-picked and promoted as the proof of their power. These healers also often keep spiritual "medium", such as stone, animal tooth, oil, or holy water, such are used to influence the patient with the power of suggestion.

Dear readers, do you see the similarities between these healers with many supposedly Christian preachers, who peddle miracle healing in the name of Jesus? These preachers work hard to promote their "ministry", often conducting a touring "healing services" across the country, and sometime, there would be patients that get "miraculously cured". Most of these success cases are again psychological or stress-induced diseases or unconfirmed or wrong diagnosis by medical doctors. Similar to the pagan healers, these Christian healers would promote these success cases as a proof of their power.

In 2 Cor 12:12, Paul stated that "signs, wonders, and mighty deeds" (ie, the ability to perform miracles) are **signs of an apostle**, which means that they are only possessed by the apostles. Therefore, if there are no more apostles, we would expect that there would be no such gifts.

I don't mean that there is no more miracles in this world. What I mean is that there is **no special spiritual gift for performing miracles**. Surely God can grant a miracle to answer a prayer. In this present day, there is no one that can claim that they have a gift of miracle; instead, everyone can pray to God and He will, in His sovereign will, answer such prayers. The word "everyone" here includes every child of God, not only preachers or special healers. If God is the one who answers prayers by His sovereign will, no one can boast and exalt himself to be a miracle performer, because such gift is an exclusive gift of an apostle.

Worldliness

A common trait of churches that proclaimed this worldly gospel is their excessive **worldliness**. These churches conform to the world's norms and fashions. Such carnal Christians dress and appear just like the world. They watch and listen to the same filthy things as the world. Even more saddening is the fact that most of these carnal churches play loud worldly music, not much different from a night club or a rock concert. If the music in your church is very similar to the music you can find in a secular radio, there are only two possibilities: Either (A) the world is getting more spiritual, or (B) your church is getting more carnal.

Sadly, it is very easy to find churches that proclaim this twisted gospel; those churches tend to be very popular and attract large crowd. Such false churches are everywhere. Beware, make sure that you are not in one of those!